VALLEY FORGE - 1945

Lt. Ralph J. Anslow, U.S. A.
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Valley

The battle that begins with a

By LT. RALPH J. ANSLOW, U.S.A.

LAST Tuesday I received more letters than all the other patients on Ward Six combined. They weren't ordinary letters.

"This is a big world," one said, "so I know I'll never have the honor of meeting you; but I want to thank you for what you have done to keep America safe. Your courage and faith is something I shall never forget, nor shall I forget what you've done." . . .

"I was a former teacher of French," another said, "before I was stricken with my illness, which has made me a shut-in for five years. (It is a condition similar to Lou Gehrig's.) I had about given up everything, but after last night I have new ambition and courage—and my French books are out this morning." . . .

"Was much interested for the fact that you came from New Castle, N. B. I was in that territory from 1889 to 1893. I worked as night operator at Beaver Brook and fished in that brook three hundred feet east of the station where Lord Beaverbrook used to fish when he was a boy. Wonder if you ever knew a fellow by the name of J. Gordon Edgar who was secretary to J. B. Snowball in Chatham. He had a sister Belle who married a clergyman. Was much interested in your case. Sincerely hope you get fixed up and make the grade for a life work." . . .

"Our two sons, Bob, twelve, and Dick, nine, were most thrilled at your story." . . .

"Que Dios le ayude a elevar a cabo todo lo que desea, y mucho mas!" . . .

Personal letters, all of them. Yet I have never seen the people who wrote them, and until the day before, they had never heard of me. I was a nameless soldier in a military hospital. They were the nameless public that tuned in its twenty million radios at eight o'clock on a Monday evening, to a program called Vox Pop.

I like radio programs where people are called in and interviewed before

Last Tuesday I received more letters than all the other patients combined. And they weren't ordinary letters. . . .

who had no dreadful secrets that cut them off from the world, people whose lives were straight and clear and open. I crossed the highway, went down the concrete steps of the breakwater, and then there was sand under my feet, and a stiff, stinging wind from the sea. I pressed into it, worked down toward the water's edge, as if I would find sympathy in the lonely roll of the waves . . . and because Ronnie was out there somewhere, on the dark and restless water.

He'd never said that he loved me. . . . I didn't want to think about that. It didn't matter surely, when his every letter said how much he missed me and longed to be with me, when I had so many endearments, so many little tendernesses to remember. But still, he hadn't mentioned me to his parents . . . and he had not, I knew, except perhaps casually. And I knew that if I'd had parents to write to, my letters would have been full of Ronnie. Why, I'd even told Uncle William and Aunt Martha many things about him. . . .

I came to the rocks at the point, and I climbed them in reckless haste, not caring that I slipped sometimes, not caring that the rough surfaces bruised my hands and my knees, finding in the physical pain some release for the hopelessness and misery stored within me. Half-way up, on the flat, windworn ledge where Ronnie and I had often sat, I rested and looked back toward Sandy Cove. The houses looked like toy houses at this distance; I could pick out the tall dark shape of Aunt Fran's house and a few doors down the lighted windows of Miss Bailey's, where Aunt Fran and Aunt Emily were having dinner, waiting for me to join them to make a fourth at bridge. What would happen, I wondered, if I should walk into Miss Bailey's and tell my aunts that I hadn't had dinner with one of the girls, that I'd been trying to call Ronnie's mother because Ronnie and I had been married in June and I was going to have a child? Would it be so much harder, after all, than the time I'd confessed to breaking Aunt Fran's prized heirloom vase when I was a little girl? I still didn't see that Ronnie and I had committed a crime, even though Aunt Fran had said that a boy ought to go to the reformatory for marrying a sixteen-year-old girl. I stared at Miss Bailey's windows, knowing that I wasn't going to walk into her house and tell my aunts anything about Ronnie and me, knowing that somehow we'd done something terribly wrong, even if I didn't understand what was wrong with marrying the person you loved.

I huddled back against the sheltering rocks, brushed my cheek against the gritty surface, tried to recall what it had been like, being there with Ronnie, trying to conjure his presence at my side. And nothing happened. I couldn't feel his arms around me, couldn't hear the way his voice dipped when he spoke my name. Couldn't see his smile, his (*Continued on page* 80)

The way love finds you

Had the summer been wasted—the summer that had brought Grace such warm enchantment, such frightening pain? Or had it been, instead, merely a prelude to other summers . .

Forge—1945

vounded soldier's return home can be more bitter than any other fighting he has faced . . .

the microphone. They have a human-interest flavor that you don't get from the big-name shows. I used to wonder how they picked the people they interviewed. They'd never picked me—I knew that, and I'd traveled around a lot. Perhaps they took someone from the audience, or a name out of the telephone directory. It could be anyone, you could tell from the voice. It just never happened to be me.

Two days after Christmas—the second Christmas I've spent at Valley Forge General Hospital—a Gray Lady came into my room with a long sheet of paper in her hand.

"Lieutenant," she said, "here's a chance for a late Christmas present."

"*For* me," I said, "or *from* me? That looks like a tax-blank."

"It isn't," she said. "The Vox Pop radio program sent us these. They're going to broadcast from the Red Cross auditorium here on New Year's night, and they want to select five people from the hospital to appear on the program. Why don't you fill it in? You might be one of the lucky ones."

"It's a big hospital," I said. "Lots of men around here have an interesting story to tell—better than mine."

"You've got as good a chance as any," she said. "Anyway, you've got nothing to lose. Why don't you give it a try?"

She been a good friend of mine, this

"Your courage and faith, and what you've done, I shall never forget."

"I agree with you; the handicapped do not want or need pity."

"I had about given up, but after your broadcast I have new courage."

Gray Lady. I don't believe in luck, but I wanted to please her.

"All right," I agreed. "What do they want to know?"

She helped me fill out the questionnaire. She helped me because I've lost one of my eyes and have only hazy vision in the other. My name: Ralph J. Anslow. . . Birthplace: Newcastle, New Brunswick, Canada, but an American citizen since 1937. . . . Years in military service: Ten . . . The long list of questions was no different from any standard questionnaire, with the exception of one curved-ball question: "What is the most outstanding experience you've ever had?" I didn't know whether this applied to business achievement or narrow escape or what. You could take it any way.

My mind went back to a certain day many years ago. I was working on a log-drive on a stream called Grog Brook, which runs into the Upsalquitch, in New Brunswick. A very bad jam had formed where this wild stream makes an almost right-angle turn after it piles up in a boiling mass against the foot of a cliff. This jam was tangled up like a keg of nails. As we worked down on the face of it, dogging the logs out one by one with our peaveys, the water which swirled away below us was feather-white.

About three hundred yards below us on the river a great granite boulder was bared by the receding current, so that logs started to pile up on the head of rock, (*Continued on page* 69)

This is not just a song. This is a plea for the thousands of nurses the Army so desperately needs. This is a challenge—is there any way in which you can help to speed the final victory?

On more than eight hundred local stations, Cpl. Leon Gray's baritone heralds the Recruiting Publicity Bureau's show, The Voice of The Army.

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NORTH CALLAHAN

Music by
NORMAN CLOUTIER

Tempo di Marcia

The Voice of the Arm - y is in the Air! Cal - ling A - mer - i - cans ev' - ry where! —

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Continued from page 47

forming what is known in rivermen's language as a center. If allowed to build up with logs coming downstream, a center can form a solid jam from bank to bank. Something has to be done—something had to be done about this one immediately.

There was only one way to get on to the center, and that was to ride a couple of logs down through the rushing water. I was being paid the extra wages of a whitewater man, so I jumped out on two of the logs we had just pried loose from the face of the jam; and in a second I was on my way down to the center. I had done this many times before, as taking off centers was part of the job of a whitewater man; but this turned out to be one of my unlucky days. When I was about half-way down a huge wave swept me off the two logs I was riding, and I disappeared into the water. I guess all the men who were watching me from the jam above thought they'd never see me again, but I came up to the surface just as I was about to be swept under the big center itself. I grabbed at the end of a log sticking out from the tangle. Waters tugged and tore at me with an almost overwhelming suction. I struggled with every ounce of strength in my body to raise at least my shoulders out of the water. Logs were smashing into the center on both sides of me. I thought to myself: "I've got to get out of here in a hurry or one of those logs will cut me in two." Inch by inch I fought my way up onto the top of the logs, until at last I was beyond the clutch of the stream. I lay there, safe, exhausted, and thanking God. To me and to the men on the jam it looked like a miracle.

Well, you couldn't put all that in. So I wrote: "The day I escaped from being swept to death under a center, on a log-drive in New Brunswick," in answer to the curved-ball question.

IT was easy, really. It didn't sound like much when you read it over, though—just an average life until you came to the war part, but nobody I knew had the war all to himself either. Oh well, I thought, I've had my money's worth. The radio program was a new idea—I had fun with it. You don't find many new ideas lying around an Army hospital when you've been there seventeen months.

At three o'clock on Friday, two days later, the head-nurse called me into her office.

"Lieutenant," she said, "you are to report immediately to the Public Relations office."

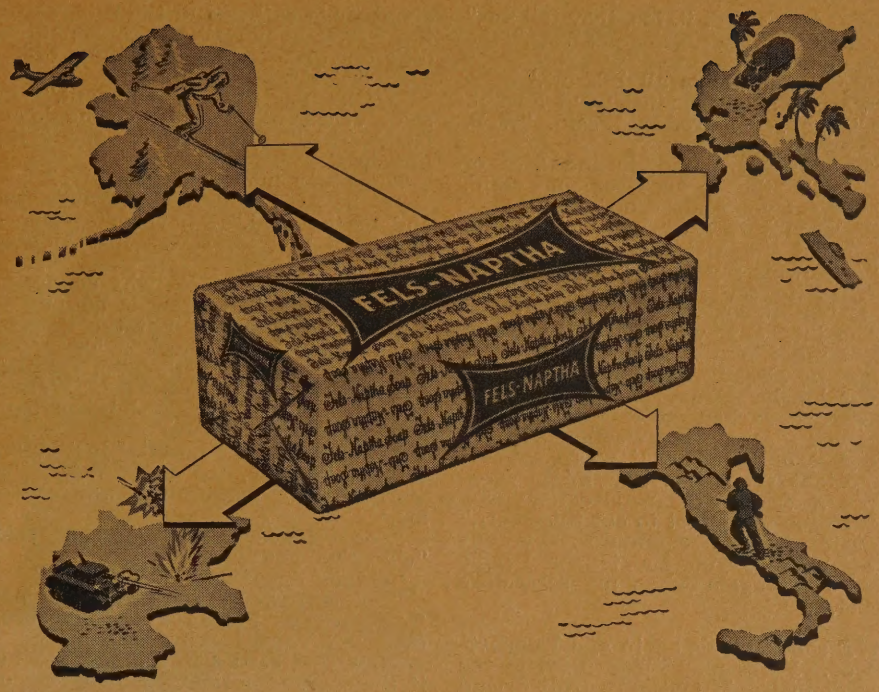
I didn't think of the questionnaire just then, but at the Public Relations office I was told that Mr. Grant of the Vox Pop program wished to talk with me. I was to have a seat and await my turn.

Next to me was a tall lieutenant with an eye missing, and wearing one hook—he'd lost an arm. The man next to him was a Ranger. He was young, only about twenty, with the reddest hair in the hospital.

"They'll never pick you, Sonny," I said. "They'll save you up for television."

"I hear they ask you what you want," he said, "and you get it. No kidding."

"A guy I heard of asked for a parrot once," said the man in front of us. "A sailor, he was. In the Brooklyn Navy



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Obviously, this will mean some further inconvenience for civilians. In the months ahead, you may have to wait more often for the familiar Fels-Naptha wrapper to appear on your grocer's shelf . . .

but the soap inside the Fels-Naptha wrapper will be Fels-Naptha Soap.

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Fels-Naptha Soap R R

BANISHES "TATTLE-TALE GRAY"

Yard. And he got it, too, they tell me."

"There's a law against parrots," the lieutenant said.

"He got it, that's all I know."

"There's a law against what I want, too," the red-haired kid said. "Well, no harm trying."

"There's two hundred and fifty of us, I got the word," someone said. "Don't get your hopes up."

At last my turn came. I walked into the office and met Mr. Grant.

"Anslow is my name," I said.

"Glad to see you, Lieutenant," he said. "Sit down, won't you?"

The interview was short. Mr. Grant asked me a few quite ordinary questions—he already had most of the information he needed on the questionnaire—we exchanged experiences and matched ideas on the weather and the progress of the war. It was easy unimportant stuff, like you might have with a friend on a street corner.

"I'm sorry I've got to cut this short," he said after a few minutes. "I've enjoyed meeting you, Lieutenant. I hope we'll meet again when my schedule's easier."

WE shook hands again and I departed. I was glad I had filled in the questionnaire. If my Gray Lady friend was around somewhere I thought I'd tell her.

The Red Cross auditorium is a big room with windows on two sides and a stage at one end. It didn't look much like a broadcasting studio. I'd seen one, and when I remembered the soundproofed walls and ceiling and the complicated control-room (all set back of a soundproof glass partition), I wondered what they were going to do about the echoes and the shuffling feet in a room where the ping-pong tables and writing-desks had just been shoved off to one side to make room for the show. I'd never thought about it before.

The next day was Saturday. Saturday, as everyone in a hospital knows, is the most lonesome day and night in the week; but this Saturday was different. At three o'clock the Public Relations office telephoned and informed me that I was to report to their office again—at once. This time I did get my hopes up.

"Mr. Grant wants to talk to me again," I figured. "That must mean something." I thought about the other two hundred and fifty people and I thought, five out of two hundred and fifty. It couldn't be me. But I was excited. I hadn't felt that way for a long time.

The same tall lieutenant was back again, too.

"I see you are one of the lucky thirty, too," he said.

"What do you mean, lucky thirty?" I replied.

He said: "We've been screened down. There are only thirty of us applicants left."

I looked at him, and somehow I got thinking about Normandy, and how a lot of fellows like this lieutenant were why we got in. That was a tough spot —where he got his.

"You sure deserve to be one of the lucky ones." I meant it, too.

"Why me?" he said.

Mr. Grant was in the office when I entered. He had several other men with him this time. Parks Johnson and Warren Hull were there. They go on the air regularly on the Vox Pop program.

The usual introductions were made and we all sat down and again talked about the weather and the progress of the war. I kept waiting for something different to happen, but nothing did.

At last Mr. Grant stood up.

"Well, good-bye, Lieutenant," he said. "It was nice of you to come down. Good luck." Not a word about the broadcast.

The other men said good-bye.

"Well," I told myself, "that's the end of the deal." I never did have a chance, I figured. I was just kidding myself.

Then I thought, look, why am I caring, anyway? This show is nothing to me. That afternoon I left the hospital for several hours. I took a long hike, and as I walked I thought, perhaps George Washington himself walked over this very path. A lot has happened at Valley Forge.

I got back to the hospital just before supper. Beverly, the little WAC who works on my ward, was waiting for me.

"For Heaven's sake," she said, "where've you been?"

"What's the matter? I was out."

"You sure were," she said. "The men from the Vox Pop program have been over here twice looking for you."

Well, that settles it, I thought. What if they were considering using me on their program? They'd probably taken someone else instead by now. I didn't care, really. Yes, I did care. I was as disappointed as a kid. I must have been counting on it, even when I was walking around thinking about other things.

So Sunday was going to be just another Sunday. That's the trouble about hoping for things. When you go back to what you had it doesn't seem so good. I decided I had to change that Sunday. The hospital bus goes into the town of Paoli, nearby, at twelve twenty-nine. I have some friends there; I'd spend Sunday afternoon with them.

I don't know whether the bus left early that particular day or I was late, but it had gone when I arrived at the hospital bus terminal. My friends were waiting for me at Paoli. There was only one thing left to do—get a taxi to come out from Phoenixville, on the other side of the hospital, to take me to Paoli. I went back to the information desk to put in a call for the taxi. Then I sat down to wait.

"YOU'RE having your troubles," the girl back of the desk said after a while. "Want me to ring them up again?"

"I don't mind waiting," I said. "I've got nothing else to do."

At that minute the telephone rang. She answered it, and then looked at me.

"For you, Lieutenant," she said.

It was Mr. Grant, calling from Philadelphia.

"Lieutenant," he said, "you certainly are a hard man to find. We've been looking all over the hospital for you."

"If I hadn't missed my bus just now," I said, "I guess you wouldn't have found me at all."

"Well, I'm sure glad you missed it," he said. "Lieutenant, we've decided to use you on the program tomorrow night. Okay with you?"

"Sure," I said. "Sure it's okay."

"We want you in the Auditorium at six-thirty tomorrow evening to run over the program."

"I'll be there."

"We've got a few presents for you, too—that is, we will have when we find out what you'd like."

For some reason I'd never taken the

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talk about the presents seriously. I didn't know what to answer.

"I can't think of anything that I need right now," I said at last. "I can think of things I'd like to have, of course. But I'd have no place to keep them."

"There must be something we can give you." He thought for a few minutes. "How about a nice watch?"

"That's right!" It was a good idea. "I do need a watch."

"You haven't got one?"

"No." Then, as I thought he was waiting for me to go on, I said: "The last watch I had was a wrist-watch. I was wearing it when the land-mine blew off my hands, so—"

"We'll certainly get you a watch," he said. "What else would you like to have? We'd like to give you something else, too."

"Would it be possible to get an electric razor?"

"We'll get one—if we have to steal it!"

I was pretty pleased about that. I figured I could manage an electric razor very nicely with my steel hooks.

At six-thirty on the dot Monday night I was in the Red Cross Auditorium. Mr. Johnson was waiting for me. He shook hands and I made a mental note: "Here is a regular guy." So many people ignore my hook, or hand, when I offer it.

"WE'RE going to interview you last, Lieutenant," he explained. "There will be four ahead of you. You probably know this isn't a script show. We want your answers to be natural. I'll run over the questions I'm going to ask you and you can figure out what you want to say. Then when the time comes just say it. No frills—and no bad language. That's the law."

I felt pretty nervous.

"What if I should—" I began.

"Don't worry," he said. "We dub it out."

The microphone was set up on the stage, with the control box on the left and the microphone cables coming in from the right. The Auditorium was set up for a big crowd.

"You people are the stars of this show," Mr. Hull said, "so you sit on the stage, just back of the mike. I'd like you here at seven-fifteen. We don't go on the air until eight but we put on an informal show first—you know, sort of fun-making. We want to get some of the boys and girls up here to do some stunts. You can't tell me there isn't a lot of hidden talent in this place."

When I was in the Army on the West Coast I used to be a fighter. I was in the welterweight class, on an Army boxing squad. I liked to fight; I was in some pretty big bouts. That night when we took our places on the stage at the appointed time I had the same feeling I used to have when I was waiting in my dressing-room before a fight—sort of an expectant excitement. The others seemed very calm. There was Sergeant Alexander Kosciusko—Kozzy, we called him—of the 28th Infantry Division, blinded at Belfontaine in France last summer, after a bitter-end hand-to-hand fight where ammunition ran out and he was down to the butt of his rifle. Private Walker Huckins was a paratrooper, knocked down in Sicily after a scramble with 88-fire back in the hills. Sergeant Gerald Goss represented the detachment at the hospital. He had charge of the military training and transportation of the wounded—a big job. He refereed the ball-games and boxing,

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too. Lieutenant Annette Grincowitz was an Army nurse, married to a military surgeon in the Southwest Pacific.

"If they can be so calm about this," I thought, "why should I get all hepped up?"

"Figure out what you want to say," Mr. Johnson had said. I knew what I wanted to say. Twenty million people would be listening, he said. I wanted to ask them for a break. There's a lot of us men without an arm, or a leg, or eyes. On the outside we may not be so much to look at. The thing people don't remember is, inside, we haven't changed. We have the same feelings and desires and ambitions we had before. All we've really lost is that old easy chance we had. Those days seem a long way back, when anything was possible because you had a whole body.

BUT nobody needs a chance handed to them. You can make your own. Every man I know is trying to shove open the hospital door. I wanted to ask people not to push it shut.

I don't know what I said at first. Mr. Johnson asked me about my injuries and I mentioned my arms and my sight and the powder burns on my face. I said I'd been seventeen months in hospitals, with another eleven to go. Then he set it up for me.

"We civilians want to know how you feel, Lieutenant. Can you tell us?"

"When I find anyone staring at me," I said, wondering if I was putting it right, "it makes me angry. Not for myself—I can stand it okay now. But it's hard at first."

"You haven't changed, have you?"

"I'm the very same as I was," I said. "If people would treat every man as they would have treated him before, I think it would help him to feel like he felt before."

"I see. Have you any plans for the future?"

"Yes." If you've got your brain you've always got plans. "I'm interested in Pan-American relations. I've been studying Spanish, to fit myself for work in that field."

It was all over almost before it started. Suddenly the big auditorium was full of noise and confusion; people crowded up on to the stage to look at our presents—I had the watch and the razor and a very nice wallet—and radio men started taking down the sound equipment. The doors at the back were opened and men began streaming out. I worked my way down, and for the time I was thinking: "There's no way to say it. I tried, but there's no way."

They brought the mail in in a basket the next morning. In a hospital, mail is the other half of a conversation. For me, America was suddenly a place where my friends lived—friends who listened to what I had tried to say and then replied so I'd know they'd heard. The last letter I somehow wanted to answer first.

"It was most inspiring, hearing all of you men tell of your experiences," it said. "It made me feel humble and glad that I am an American with men like all of you on our side. I so agree with your view regarding the returning wounded soldier. The handicapped do not want pity nor do they need it. To lead a natural, everyday life is all they want, for they are just human beings exactly as they were before.

"I know because I too am somewhat handicapped. I met with a street-car accident when a child, losing both limbs close to the hips and my right arm at the shoulder. Forty years ago science had not progressed as it has now, and I did not have the opportunity to learn to work. However, I have led a happy normal life, and do as much and more than many persons more fortunate. I keep house for my Dad, cook, bake, etc., do all kinds of fancy work—well, just everything. I can and do count my blessings.

"I admire your courage, and want to say to you and all the men there that we are mighty proud of you. Good luck, and God bless you all."

God bless you, lady, from Ward Six at Valley Forge.

This article was written by Lieutenant Anslow while a student in the Educational Reconditioning Program at Valley Forge General Hospital. If you, too, would like to add to Lieutenant Anslow's morning mail, won't you address him in care of RADIO ROMANCES, *205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, New York—we'll be happy to see to it that your letters go on to him.*

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